

GESO GSEU Voice

Striking Graduate Teachers at Yale and Columbia

April 22, 2005

Head of Yale Trustees Agrees to Meet with GESO

Emma Ross, History of Art

In a major breakthrough, Roland Betts, the Senior Fellow of the Yale Corporation, agreed to set up a meeting with GESO next week. GESO has long been asking the Yale administration for dialogue and discussion concerning our issues. Until today, the administration has refused to engage at all. This week's strike, however, has finally opened up the opportunity that we have been demanding for years.

Here's how it happened: The GESO picket line traveled to SSS after a tip-off that some Yale trustees would be meeting there. Over one hundred picketers were chanting on the sidewalk along Grove Street, while another hundred were marching through the courtyard behind the building. Suddenly, a picketer spied President Richard Levin walking up the sidewalk,

leading an entourage of Yale trustees including Roland Betts, Len Baker, and Ed Bass (B. Daniel Parker Jr, came late). The trustees tried to appear nonchalant while walking past a mass of their own teachers chanting "What do we want? Contract! When do we want it? Now!"

We stayed outside, picketing, chanting, and singing along to the trumpet and drums, while the trustees tried to maintain decorum inside

SSS 114. A small group of strikers went into the building and stood stoically and silently in the balcony of SSS 114, holding their picket signs proudly aloft as President Levin attempted to conduct business as usual.

We were gathered together and picketing on the sidewalk of Grove St when everyone came streaming out of SSS. Local 34 President Laura Smith went up and introduced herself to Roland Betts, and then introduced him to Wendi Walsh, GESO's lead organizer, who said, "I'm glad

you're here today. Turn around, look at these graduate teachers, I feel confident that they're out here today for issues that you care about as well. We just want to sit down and talk with you about those issues. Can we do that?" Roland Betts responded, "Obviously, we can't talk here. We can't even hear each other." After she made clear that we would be happy to meet anytime, anywhere, Roland Betts responded, "Call me in my office in New York, and I would be happy to meet with you." Just to make sure that we could all count on this meeting, she then asked, "Can you promise me that if I call your office to set up a meeting, that you can guarantee me that you will set up that meeting and keep that meeting and we will meet?", to which he replied with a loud and clear, "Absolutely."

The picketers gathered together to hear what happened, and a loud picket line became even louder with the cheers and celebrations. We continued marching down the sidewalk chanting, laughing, and hugging each other, confident that the strike is working. We are opening up this university.



Quotes from the Line

"I really appreciate the strong show of support for GESO from our brothers and sisters at Penn, UMass, and Ohio State. We are really all part of the same struggle"

—Brendan Matz, *History of Science and Medicine*

"It was important to hear from other union drives to embolden us here at Yale. I was especially inspired by the support from OSU."

—Sam Nelson, *Sociology*

"When you see faculty whose work you really respect coming out to support you - especially when you understand the political economy of the academy - it's one of the most powerful things I've experienced this week."

—Michael Jo, *History*

Picket Schedule Friday April 22

8am Breakfast
8.30 am Roving picket line
11:30 am Rally outside
Helen Hadley Hall
(Temple between
Trumbull/Grove)
March up Prospect St
12:30 pm Rally outside
President's Office with
Barbara Ehrenreich,
author of *Nickel and Dime*

Reverend Jackson: *Stand Up And Fight*

Len Nalencz, English

The crowd was primed by Shana Redmond, a graduate teacher who was as poised and entertaining on stage as Billy Crystal at the Oscars. Redmond introduced one of her own students, Gloria Alday, who praised the way GESO has put diversity and accessibility on the table for discussion. Then Doris Rogan, a Yale retiree



who kicked off the 2003 strike by occupying the Yale Investments office overnight, accused Yale of still scheming to outlive its retirees rather than renegotiate their pensions. Then Andrea van den Heever (CCNE) said, "Remember

this week. I promise you will be able to tell your children and grandchildren you were a part of an important change in the democracy of this university and this country." And then we were ready.

A National Day of Action to End Casualization

Jay Driskell, History

At noon yesterday, striking teachers gathered in front of Sterling Memorial Library to hear messages of solidarity from academic unions all across the nation. David Montgomery, emeritus professor of history opened the rally by calling on Yale to recognize GESO and declaring that this week's strike "is extremely important, not only for graduate employees at Yale, but also for graduate employees all over the country." Following the NLRB decision of last summer, graduate teacher unions across the country have begun to collaborate much more closely.

Today marked a huge step forward in this growing movement. Over nine graduate teacher unions, including both the UC and SUNY/-CUNY systems, held actions in solidarity with us during our strike and submitted the Declaration of Principles to their university administrations. UMass-Amherst even held a one-day walkout! Matt Williams, an organizer from Ohio State University told the crowd, "This fight is not yours alone. Because Columbia is with you – because OSU is with you – because graduate employees everywhere are with you, victory for GESO is inevitable."

The Reverend Jesse Jackson took the stage to riotous applause. He began by linking the organizing drives among graduate teachers nationwide, insisting "NYU cannot go backwards on workers' rights to organize, and Yale and Columbia should go forward." He urged the crowd to "stand tall and stand together with a sense of justice. We're all one people." Like the United States itself, Yale and Columbia have admirable mission statements, which they too often fail to carry out. Jackson celebrated the historic partnership of Yale, Columbia, and its many allies from Penn to the University of California system, and ended by reflecting on the unrealized potential of democracy, alluding specifically to racial inequality. "We never knew how good baseball could be until everyone could play. We won't know how good this country can be until everyone can participate."

Support from All Over

The General Secretary of the La CGT
The General Secretary of the Force Ouvrière
The General Secretary of the Fédération Syndicale Unitaire
The President of the La Confédération Etudiante

The President of the Fédération québécoise des professeurs et professeurs d'université
The President of the Canadian Association of University Teachers
The Chair of the Canadian Federation of Students
The Chair of the Canadian Union Of Public Employees of Ontario as well as local affiliates
The General Secretaries of the Association of University Teachers and the National Association of Teachers of Further and Higher Education (UK)
The National Union of Students (UK)
The President of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
The Presidents of several branches of the National Tertiary Education Union (Australia)
Student Council in Seoul National University Graduate School of Social Sciences
Korean Irregular Professors' Union
Korean University Workers' Union
Korean Professors' Union
Korean Institute for Progressive Education
Solidarity For Education Rights of the Disabled (Korea)
Rappresentanze Sindacali di Base (Italy)
Unione degli Universitari (Italy)
The General Secretary of the Central Única Dos Trabalhadores (Brazilian AFL-CIO)
A Written Declaration from the European Parliament Geraint Davies, MP
Hong Kong Legislative Councillor Lee Cheuk Yan
The Chair of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions
ORIT, the Interamerican Regional Organization of Laborers, which represents 45 million people